

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES**  
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Waterfowl Population Estimates  
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below  
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: January 11 & 14, 2008  
Catahoula Lake: and Northeast LA:  
January 15, 2008, NW LA: Jan. 17  
Scaup survey: January 7, 2008

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Estimates made from Aircraft (\*\*) Estimate less than 1,000

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	115,000	13,000	7,000	135,000
MOTTLED	35,000	24,000		59,000
GADWALL	341,000	140,000	*	481,000
WIGEON	7,000	15,000	*	22,000
GW TEAL	324,000	52,000		376,000
BW TEAL	127,000	43,000		170,000
SHOVELER	175,000	16,000		191,000
PINTAIL	149,000	31,000	9,000	189,000
TOTAL DABLERS	1,273,000	334,000	16,000	1,623,000
SCAUP	3,000	21,000		24,000
RINGNECKED	32,000	22,000	32,000	86,000
CANVASBACK		42,000	56,000	98,000
TOTAL DIVERS	35,000	85,000	88,000	208,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,308,000	419,000	104,000	1,831,000
COOTS	620,000	649,000	7,000	1,276,000

**COMMENTS:**

The estimate of 1.8 million ducks on this survey is slightly lower than December's estimate of 2.0 million, but 60% lower than the 4.4 million estimated in January 2007. It is the lowest January

estimate since 1987 and is 44% below both the most recent 5-year and long-term averages (3.2 million). Increases in gadwalls (10%), green-winged teal (57%), shovelers (77%), scaup (100%), and canvasbacks (70%) from the December survey were outdone by large declines in ring-necked ducks (70%), pintails (53%), and blue-winged teal (30%). All species except blue-wings, shovelers, and canvasback were well below long-term January averages. Despite lower numbers than in December, blue-wings remained 70% above long-term January average of 99,000, while mallards were about one-third the long-term average of 420,000. During this survey, we also counted 11,000 redheads on Catahoula Lake and estimated 46,000 black-bellied whistling ducks in southwest Louisiana, two species that are not normally included in this report.

As we have seen in recent surveys, the distribution was strongly biased toward southwest Louisiana where 75% of the ducks were counted. That was much less pronounced in December, but large declines in pintails and ring-necked ducks, which were a large proportion of last month's southeast Louisiana estimate, re-established the bias. The 1.3 million ducks estimated in southwest Louisiana is 30% below the most recent 5-year average, but the 419,000 in southeast Louisiana is 60% below that average.

An additional 146,000 ducks and 215,000 geese (94% snow, 6% white-fronted) were counted on selected habitats in northeast Louisiana. We were unable to conduct a December survey of this area but that is similar to the 168,000 ducks and more than the 175,000 geese counted on the same areas in January 2007. Pintails (45,000), mallards (28,000), shovelers (21,000), and gadwalls (14,000), and green-wings (14,000) were the most abundant species.

We also counted 12,000 ducks, mostly mallards, gadwalls, and scaup, and 230 Canada geese in northwest Louisiana, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River and upper Toledo Bend reservoir. We were unable to conduct the December survey and poor weather prevented us from completing this survey such that only the habitats south of Shreveport were counted. Still, the 12,000 ducks seen was similar to the 13,000 counted on the entire survey in January 2007.

A total of 14,000 scaup were estimated from our scaup survey on Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. That is a 40% increase from the 10,000 in December, but is far less than the 407,000 in January of 2007.

Despite the low estimates reported on this survey, reports of good hunting and large numbers of ducks in some areas have persisted. Concurrent surveys of Wildlife Management Areas and National Wildlife Refuges have seen numbers of ducks more similar to last January than this survey. We did note very large concentrations of ducks at the mouth of the Mississippi River and on White Lake Wetland Conservation Area off of the survey lines, but over broad areas, especially in southeast Louisiana, we saw fewer ducks than last year.

Varying temperatures were seen since the December survey. Average temperatures 12 degrees above normal were replaced by a mild freeze across north Louisiana just prior to the December 15 opening of the second segment of the duck season. Another cold front moved through the state around Christmas, and very cold arctic air moved through during the first week of January before being replaced by record warm temperatures on January 7 – 8 prior to the start of this survey. These fronts, especially during the first week of January, along with reports of freezing wetlands into Missouri and Arkansas created conditions favorable to ducks moving into Louisiana. Increases in green-wings, canvasbacks, and shovelers, along with smaller proportional increases in gadwalls and mallards from the December survey suggest that did occur, but not to the levels seen last year.

Habitat conditions remained in good condition in coastal Louisiana. Marsh water levels were slightly elevated from December but still very good for feeding ducks. Increased managed water was available in the agricultural areas compared to December but there was little shallow-flooding from precipitation. Water levels at Catahoula Lake have remained near management targets for most of the period between surveys, but were slightly elevated during the survey. Northeast Louisiana, however, remained very dry. Habitat in that area was improved from November, almost entirely due to managed water. Increased precipitation in late December was insufficient to counter the 14-inch deficit in some areas, and there is very little flooding in the river systems.